

Peer reviewing a draft SIGN guideline

Information for patients, carers and members of the public



Who are we?

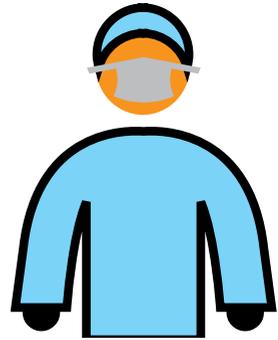
The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) is part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland, a public body that provides advice and guidance to the NHS in Scotland and inspects hospitals in Scotland to ensure they are safe and clean.

What do we do?

We write clinical guidelines for all NHS staff (for example, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists and occupational therapists).

These guidelines give advice on the best treatments that are available.

We write them by working with health and social care staff and by consulting with patients, carers and members of the public.



What are SIGN guidelines for?

Our guidelines aim to:

- help health and social care professionals and patients understand medical evidence so they can use it to make decisions about a person's care
- make sure patients get the best care available, no matter where they live
- help to improve the quality of health and social care across Scotland.



Who is involved in developing guidelines?

To develop a SIGN guideline, we bring together a group of people from across Scotland. Typically, the guideline group will include:

- health and social care professionals, for example, hospital doctors, nurses, general practitioners, pharmacists and social workers
- patient and public representatives.



What is a SIGN guideline based on?

Our guidelines are based on medical and scientific research. We search for evidence for the best ways to diagnose, treat and care for patients. If no research has been done, the guideline group members may use their experience and judgement to suggest best practice.

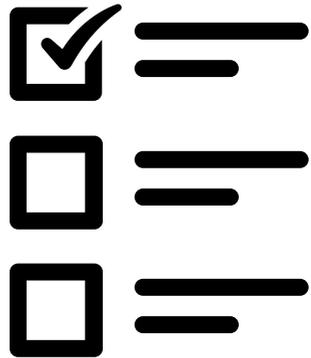
Patient and carer views and concerns add to the knowledge and experience of healthcare staff. For example, patients and carers can provide knowledge on what it is like to live with a condition.

They can explain the advantages and disadvantages of treatments based on their experience. This allows the group to make an informed decision on whether or not to recommend treatments.

What is peer review?

Before our guidelines are published they are reviewed by independent health and social care experts, or 'peer reviewers'. We ask peer reviewers to comment on the draft guideline by asking themselves the following questions:

- how accurate is the interpretation of the evidence?
- how clear are the recommendations?
- how useful will the guideline be as a working tool?
- does the guideline reflect what they believe would be patients' and carers' views?



We put all the comments the peer reviewers make into a report. Each point is discussed by the guideline group and we will change the draft guideline if it is appropriate. If no change is made, we will record the reasons for this.

We publish the report with the guideline. Before publication the SIGN editorial team also checks that the peer reviewers' comments have been addressed.

Why involve patients and carers in peer review?

We also invite patients and carers to take part in the peer review of each guideline. This is to make sure that the guideline is patient centred by considering issues that are important to patients and carers.

We ask patients, carers and members of the public to check that patients' and carers' views are reflected throughout the guideline.

If you are reviewing the guideline from a patient, carer or public perspective, you do not have to look at every part of the guideline but you can comment on those areas in which you feel that your experience is most relevant.

We ask patients, carers and the public to comment particularly on the section called '**Provision of information**'. We assure you that we will read and consider every comment you make, but we cannot promise to accept all of them.

Can I share the draft guideline with others?

The draft guidelines sent out to peer reviewers look like finalised documents, but there are usually still many important changes and corrections to be made before they are published.

We hold an open consultation at the same time as asking peer reviewers to comment.

We put the draft guideline on the SIGN website and any NHS staff or member of the public can send in comments. You can direct people to the SIGN website to submit their own comments.

We ask all peer reviewers to complete a declaration of interests form. This is so we can identify any interests that you have which could influence your view on the content of the guideline.



If you discuss the draft guideline with friends or family, it is important to bear in mind that health and social care professionals won't be following the recommendation until after it is published.

How should I start reviewing a draft guideline?

SIGN guidelines are large documents so following a series of logical steps is a helpful way to review a draft guideline.

There is no right way to review a guideline.

The approach you take will depend on you as an individual. It is difficult to say how long it will take you to review a guideline as everyone reads at different rates and will use different approaches to review it.

You will be given four weeks to review the guideline so you may want to do this in stages.

The following approach is one that you may want to consider. Before you sit down to study the draft closely:

Gather your thoughts and ideas

- Get a general idea of what the guideline is about
- Look through the guideline first
- Look at the contents and chapter headings
- Read the introduction.



You may want to consider the following questions. Each guideline covers specific issues so not all of these questions will apply to every guideline.

- What does the title mean to you?
- Are you aware of this medical condition?
- What questions might people have about the problem or treatment?
- What have you heard from other patients or carers about their concerns? For example, treatments might they be considering?
- What outcomes might they be hoping for? What side effects might they be concerned about?
- What aspects of treatment and care might be particularly important to patients?
- Are you aware of patients or carers being given any information or support?
- Is it clear where appropriate support and advice can be obtained?
- Who might want to know about the conclusions and recommendations of the guideline?
- What is your overall impression of the guideline?

Review the guideline

Read the draft guideline carefully and consider it in the light of your own experience and expertise. Make rough notes on the text itself, or on a sheet of paper.

When you think you understand the guideline, you could try rewriting the main ideas in plain language or imagine trying to explain them to a friend. Ask yourself if it still makes sense.

- Are the various sections clearly titled?
- Is there a logical thread to the guideline? Is it there from beginning to end or does it disappear?
- Do you think the guideline is relevant to patients like you? Is it relevant to carers?
- From your perspective as a patient, would the treatments recommended work in practice? What challenges might a patient face?
- Are there patient outcomes that should have been considered?
- Is the language clear and accurate?
- Are some sentences long or difficult to understand?
- Are there any unnecessary abbreviations and is there too much jargon?
- Are there any technical words and phrases that could be included in a glossary?
- Can you work out the likelihood of a patient benefiting or experiencing harm from the treatment being suggested? Are other findings, for example side effects, clearly reported?

- Are there any sections in the guideline that you think are particularly well written?
- Is there anything missing, or anything you expected to be covered which is not?

Provision of information chapter

Each SIGN guideline contains a section called 'Provision of information'. This section is designed for health and social care professionals to use in discussion with patients and carers. It is not meant to be comprehensive educational material designed directly for patients.

We particularly ask patients, carers and members of the public to comment on this section and it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions:

- do any jargon or technical terms need to be explained?
- is the tone of the section appropriate?
- is the wording of this section sensitive?
- is the information useful for patients and carers?

Submit your comments

In your invitation to peer review you will be given a link to an online form for returning your comments. You will also be asked to complete a form to declare any potential conflicts of interest. You will be asked to gather your comments by section.

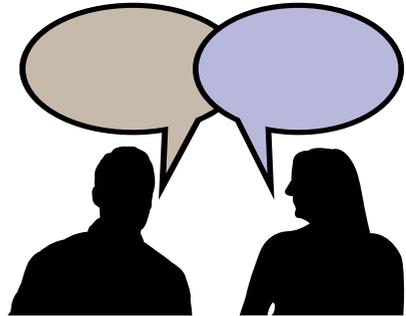
In preparing your review it may be helpful to look back at your notes and, bearing these in mind consider the following issues as the framework for your review.

- If you had any questions have they been answered?
- Can you suggest changes to how the guideline has covered the topic or how it is written?
- Have you given us positive feedback as well as negative?
- When possible, it would be helpful if you try to suggest changes which could improve the text. Explain why you recommend doing it differently and why it is important.

Will I get feedback on my comments?

A consultation report recording peer reviewers' comments and the guideline group's responses is published on the SIGN website alongside the final guideline.

You will be sent a link to the webpage for the guideline and supporting materials when they are published.



Alternative formats



If you would like a copy of this booklet in another format such as large print, phone 0131 623 4720 or email sign@sign.ac.uk

www.sign.ac.uk



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The Healthcare Environment Inspectorate, the Scottish Health Council, the Scottish Health Technologies Group, the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) and the Scottish Medicines Consortium are key components of our organisation.

